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INSTINCT, VIOLENCE, AND SURVIVAL: A STUDY OF ANIMAL IMAGERY IN TED HUGHES

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ABSTRACT

Ted Hughes is one of the greatest British writers of the 20thC England. He was appointed as the Poet Laureate in the year 1984 and he continued this prestigious position until his death. This British poet married fellow American confessional poetess Sylvia Plath in the year 1956. On 16th June, 1956 they tied the holy knot to celebrate the Blooms day and show their tribute to James Joyce. They had disastrous married life having two children. They parted their ways in the year 1962. Unfortunately the gifted poet Sylvia Plath assassinated herself in 1963. Hughes has created a profound impact on English Literature and his readers with his prolific writing and with his exclusive animal imagery. His animals are the primitive natural creations and are shining with their violence, primitive nature, cruelty and awfulness of their appearances and existences. In his writings nature emerges in its primitive form with its unique creatures that are vibrating with vigor and their special position and place amidst the vast nature. The creatures are asserting boastfully their wild existences and the essential exclusiveness of their existences for the perfect poise and sustainability of the eco-system of the physical world. Hughes' use of vivid imagery and poignant symbolism and skilful picturization of the wild animals in the natural setting make his poetry lively and create a long-lasting impact in the readers' mind such is the power of his artistic excellence that it capture the readers mind instantly and cast a permanent impact in his psyche. Ted Hughes is famous as an animal writer and he writes poetry for children also.

KEY WORDS: *Nature, Animal, Primitive, Raw, Violent, Intensity, Life, Crow, Jaguar, Pike*

METHODOLOGY

The study follows close reading of all the texts. The textual, analytical and interpretative study helps in the deeper understanding of Ted Hughes' poetry. The theoretical approaches of the Psychoanalytic Theory, Mythological / Archetypal theory, Ecocriticism, Existentialism, New Historicism and Structuralism provide this analytical methodological research a profound wisdom, clarity and detailed understanding of Ted Hughes' authentic high standard and spirited writings. The secondary sources, scholarly articles and writings have assisted in the enrichment and clarity of the poems.

- **Hawk in the Rain (1957)** is the first poetic collection of the brilliant British poet, Ted Hughes. It is dedicated to Sylvia Plath, his spouse. It is a collection of 40 poems. The Hawk in the Rain, The Jaguar, Macaw and Little Miss, The Thought-Fox, The Horses, Vampire, Six Young Men, Two Wise Generals etc are
- The Jaguar (1957) – This celebrated poem is published in the anthology Hawk in the Rain (1957). Here in this poem the poet Ted Hughes demonstrates the unnatural, lazy and inactive behaviors of the animals and the birds. Animals are violent, energetic and of fierce nature. They are living in the natural world with vivacity and vitality. In the caged state they have lost their real selves and living lives in complete contrast with their actual selves.

The apes yawn and adore their fleas in the sun.
The parrots shriek as if they were on fire, or strut
Like cheap tarts to attract the stroller with the nut.
Fatigued with indolence, tiger and lion

Lie still as the sun. The boa-constrictor's coil
Is a fossil. Cage after cage seems empty, or
Stinks of sleepers from the breathing straw.
It might be painted on a nursery wall.

The untamed wildness is compelled to live in tamed and domesticated ambience pathetically losing their real existences. The sight is pitiful. The violence of the predatory animals is reduced to laziness and lifeless dullness. While all the zoo is pervaded with comfort and laziness, void and sleepiness. In one of the cage makes people enchanted and amazed. The cage confines a wild jaguar full of violence and wild spirit. It is enraged with the confinement and its eye is shining with energy and life-force.

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On a short fierce fuse. Not in boredom—
The eye satisfied to be blind in fire,
By the bang of blood in the brain deaf the ear—
He spins from the bars, but there's no cage to him
More than to the visionary his cell:
His stride is wildernesses of freedom:
The world rolls under the long thrust of his heel.
Over the cage floor the horizons come.

The jaguar may be confined in a cage but its free spirit and natural wild energy makes it completely free from any bondage. It is like a spiritual visionary entity may be confined within the cage of the body but its soul and spirit is illuminated by the divine glory and enlightenment. The jaguar may be inside an artificial confinement but within itself and inside its heart it is the untamed, fierce and wild spirit which cannot be controlled. The poem is pervaded with powerful metaphors like 'fossil' snake and the 'fire' jaguar which intensifies the seriousness of the poetic theme. While all the birds, snakes and other animals are tamed in the artificial and comfortable environment of the zoo forgetting and forsaking their natural attributes. The jaguar is shining with its wild vitality and fearlessness and untamed attitude.

- **Hawk Roosting-** The poem is lively dramatic monologue of the violent predatory bird of prey, the Hawk. The bird is asserting its supremacy and its dominance in the natural world. It is meditative of its action. The bird in its profound contemplation practices and perfectly plans its next moves. It is not an ordinary bird; it reflects its supremacy and its top position in the natural world as it 'sit in the top'. It expresses its thoughtfulness which shows its supreme quality of thinking and pondering before action.

  I sit in the top of the wood, my eyes closed.
  Inaction, no falsifying dream
  Between my hooked head and hooked feet:
  Or in sleep rehearse perfect kills and eat.

Like the emperor of the world or the omnipotent God himself, the sun, the air and the whole world serve it with their utmost potential to help the predatory bird to exercise its power in the world. The hawk expresses its supreme control and authoritarian position to dominate the whole universe. '*Now I hold Creation in my foot* '.It is brutal and arrogant in nature. Like the God of destruction it exposes its predation directly and with pride-

My manners are tearing off heads -
The allotment of death.
For the one path of my flight is direct
Through the bones of the living.
No arguments assert my right:

The poem expresses the violence of the wild bird and its oppressive nature and it's all pervading control over the universe. Its totalitarian mindset and authoritarian attitude will never allow any change or rebellion against the authority. It is against any kind of transformation. The natural creation is timeless and permanent. It boasts its dictatorship throughout the literary piece.

Nothing has changed since I began.
My eye has permitted no change.
I am going to keep things like this.

Though a natural creation but its words are against universal and natural system as it affirms that it will not permit any change but in reality change is the only constant. Darwin's evolution also shows the transformation of creatures according to the balance of nature and the physical world.

The renowned naturalist Charles Darwin in his ground- breaking text "On the Origin of Species" (1859) also demonstrate that evolution is a mandatory aspect in the natural world to cope up better with the changing time and the survival of the fittest .

- **Pike (1960) -** In this poem Ted Hughes exposes the raw, violent and predatory nature of the fresh water fish, Pike. Pike is a timeless, immortal killer fish, vivid with its malevolent instinct. It is a perfect mixture of aesthetic and elegant beauty with terrible malevolent nature as 'indeed they spare nobody'.

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Pike, three inches long, perfect
Pike in all parts, green tigering the gold.
Killers from the egg: the malevolent aged grin.
They dance on the surface among the flies.

Or move, stunned by their own grandeur,
Over a bed of emerald, silhouette
Of submarine delicacy and horror.
A hundred feet long in their world.

In ponds, under the heat-struck lily pads -
Gloom of their stillness:
Logged on last year's black leaves, watching upwards.
Or hung in an amber cavern of weeds

The pike is in deep inside a cruel and evil nature, it not due to just a raw instinct but the core maliciousness is deep ingrained in its nature. This brutality is not restrained in natural world only. The darkness prevails in the human world also. The poet has fresh memory of his fishing many years ago and he recalls his firsthand experience of this primitive fishes in a 'legendary' pond.

- **The Thought Fox (1995)-** This is one of the wonderful poetic creations of Ted Hughes. Here the Fox is representing the process of an artistic creation and the writing of a thoughtful piece, the poet's patient waiting for the poetic inspiration. This poem represents the emergence of a powerful idea in the poet's mind to create a profound and excellent work of art. The thought fox refers to the poet's eager waiting for the thought provoking idea which will fill the blank pages.

Cold, delicately as the dark snow
A fox's nose touches twig, leaf;
Two eyes serve a movement, that now
And again now, and now, and now

Sets neat prints into the snow
Between trees, and warily a lame
Shadow lags by stump and in hollow
Of a body that is bold to come

The thought arrives from the mysterious darkness of the wild nature which also symbolizes the dark unchartered paths of the human sub-conscious mind. In the still midnight the poet is meditating for the proper idea and perfect theme of his poetry which is a must and necessary ambience for the creation of a masterly work of art. Silence and patience are essential components for the creation of a masterpiece and for spiritual enlightenment it also requires a prolonged and patient waiting.

Across clearings, an eye,
A widening deepening greenness,
Brilliantly, concentratedly,
Coming about its own business

In this lines the poet refers to the creation of the poetry and the deep and focused concentration of the poetic idea taking its proper shape 'widening deepening greenness' means in its graver and deeper vivid form the abstract idea taking the concrete shape of words and make the poem enriched and impregnated with thought –provoking ideas for the readers.

The journey and the arrival of the fox express the capture of the abstract poetic ideas in the concrete form of words in the shape of poetry.
Till, with a sudden sharp hot stink of fox
It enters the dark hole of the head.
The window is starless still; the clock ticks,
The page is printed.
The complete journey of the fox from its emergence from 'the dark hole of the head' makes the 'blank page' thoroughly 'printed' which refers to the completion of the writing of the poem.

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- **Crow: From the Life and Songs of the Crow *(1970*)** - This experimental poem is written just after the pathetic death of Sylvia Plath. The poem is completely unconventional in tone and nature. In this poem Ted Hughes exposes the brutal and tyrannical nature of humanity. With vivid and brutal imagery The Crow represents the arrogance and destructive spirit of human world. The darkness of human soul can disregard the commands of God such is the audacity of human beings. The poet exposes the cruelty of people and their blasphemous activities. They can disregard Christianity, God and his moral lessons. As religion teaches us to spread love, humanity can go against the scriptures and do just the contrary. The crow survives in the chaotic world though its endurance and resistance.

Crow realized God loved him-
Otherwise, he would have dropped dead.
So that was proved.
Crow reclined, marveling, on his heart-beat.

And he realized that God spoke Crow -
Just existing was His revelation.

But what
Loved the stones and spoke stone?
They seemed to exist too.
And what spoke that strange silence
After his clamour of caws faded?

According to Professor Neil Roberts **"***Crow* holds a uniquely important place in Hughes oeuvre. It heralds the ambitious second phase of his work, lasting roughly from the late sixties to the late seventies, when he turned from direct engagement with the natural world to unified mythical narratives and sequences. It was his most controversial work: a stylistic experiment which abandoned many of the attractive features of his earlier work, and an ideological challenge to both Christianity and humanism. Hughes wrote *Crow*, mostly between 1966 and 1969, after a barren period following the death of Sylvia Plath. He looked back on the years of work on Crow as a time of imaginative freedom and creative energy, which he felt that he never subsequently recovered. He described Crow as his masterpiece..."

Lupercal(1960)- This is the second collection of verse of the celebrated writer British poet Ted Hughes. The main theme of this poetry collection is that both human and animal worlds are dominated by the powerful -the survival of the fittest.

Theoretical Approaches
Psychoanalytic Theory- Through the vivid animal imageries Hughes shows the anxiety, repressed sub-consciousness of human beings.

Mythological / Archetypal theory- The mythological representation of the crow shows the birth, death and rebirth cycles.

Ecocriticism- Nature is the predominating and controlling force. It plays as a veritable character and controls the surrounding world.

Existentialism- The absurd existence in the crow and the survival

New Historicism- Cold war allusions are there in Hawk Roosting

Structuralism- Binary oppositions are prevailed in the poems.

CONCLUSION

Thus, Ted Hughes with stark imagery and intense symbolism demonstrates the primitive animal nature. They are striking with boastful self- assertion and primitive wildness. Often behind the hidden animal imagery, the brilliant poet lays bare the crude reality of human world. His writing is pervaded with intense and profound ideas, masterful use of imagery, symbolism and sharp wit. His poetic genius is the cause of his world wide acceptance as a unique poet with keen observation and brilliant presentation. He has contributed English Literature with his genuine and genius literary works.

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